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SUBJECT: POLISH ISAF STRATEGY UNCLEAR ON CIVILIAN ROLE

Classified By: Political Counselor F. Daniel Sainz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The GOP has engaged in a continuing interagency review to determine its long-term strategy in Afghanistan. The strategic planning process has gained little traction, stalling on the question of how long to plan for a Polish presence. On the other hand, the GOP has taken near-term steps to shore up its civilian effort in Ghazni -- extending an open invitation for the provincial governor to visit Warsaw and proposing a study trip to the region for representatives from its ministries of Agriculture, Finance, and Labor. On the national level, the Poles predict a difficult election year, but do not see an alternative to President Karzai. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A leading MFA Afghanistan expert told poloffs that after three months of inter-agency meetings chaired at the ministerial level, there had been little progress in developing overall strategy for Afghanistan. Polish MFA Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Department Beata Stoczynska told us it was difficult to develop "the general idea" when it was not clear if Polish forces would stay for three years or twenty. Without this timeline, Stoczynska said, the inter-agency review had been unable to draw any conclusions. Stoczynska said the next inter-agency meeting in December would focus on the Ghazni PRT, how to develop the civilian and reconstruction component, and how to work better with the Americans and Afghans. She said the GOP would increase its budget for Afghanistan from eight million PLN to 40 million, in addition to the 25 million USD contribution from the U.S. She could not predict when Poland might be able to realize its goal of taking over leadership of the Ghazni PRT from the U.S.

¶3. (C) Stoczynska said gaining the cooperation of Provincial Governor Osman Osmani was the most immediate priority in Ghazni. She said that if he decides to cooperate with the insurgents, then "we will lose." Unfortunately, so far Osmani is reluctant to cooperate with the Poles, Stoczynska said: "He doesn't know us. If he came here it would help." Accordingly, the Polish Ambassador in Afghanistan will travel to Ghazni December 6 and issue an open invitation to Osmani to come to Warsaw. With regard to staffing its own PRT in Ghazni, Stoczynska said there would be a "study trip" to the region sometime between February and May 2009. This trip would include not just members of the MFA and MOD, but also members of the ministries of Agriculture, Finance and Labor.

¶4. (C) Stoczynska indicated that President Karzai had held productive bilateral meetings with Polish leaders on the margins of the November 11 celebration in Warsaw of the 90th anniversary of Polish independence. She said the GoP sees no viable alternatives to Karzai emerging in the run-up to the

September national elections. Poland is not looking for someone to replace Karzai, she said, although that could change if the U.S. were to propose someone else.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The MFA is seized with the importance of a balanced civilian-military approach to the counterinsurgency. The lack of an overall strategy remains a concern, as does the focus on timelines rather than objectives. However, the planned outreach to Governor Osmani and the proposed study group present welcome developments. Post is looking at the possibility of bringing in experts to advise the GoP on the challenge of carving out a role for Polish civilians in areas such as reconstruction, development and policing.

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